

Summary  
Report ...

# Korea Dynamite Explosion

November 11, 1977



Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance  
Agency for International Development

July 1979

Korea--Dynamite Explosion

PNAAP 764

Data

Date: November 11, 1977, approximately 2135 hours local time

Location: Iri, Korea (120 miles south of Seoul)

Dead: 47 dead, 9 missing and presumed dead

Injured: 1,343 injured, 185 of these critically

People Affected: 9,000 - 10,000 of which 7,873 homeless

Damage: Estimated at \$12.5 million to homes and other buildings, 811 buildings destroyed, 780 buildings half destroyed, 6,042 buildings damaged, railroad tracks and cars (70 freight and passenger cars, 2 locomotives, and 4 engine cars) destroyed or severely damaged, 41 schools damaged

The Disaster

- A freight train loaded with 25 tons of dynamite and other explosives detonated while parked in the railyard of the city of Iri (population of about 120,000). In violation of Korean law, explosives and detonating fuses had been loaded in the same railroad car. It was also a violation of law that the dangerous cargo had been delayed for a day in the Iri station which was not its final destination.
- The explosion was set off by a candle left unattended on a powder box when the guard escorting the explosives fell asleep.
- It was the worst peacetime explosion in Korea.

Action Taken by the Government of the Republic of Korea and by the Korean People

- All available relief and rehabilitation was extended to Iri. Army troops, civil defense corpsmen, and students (207,016 people) were mobilized to help clear debris with the help of 740 pieces of heavy machinery.
- The local Disaster Control headquarters was headed by the Cholla Namdo (Province) Governor.
- The Ministry of Health and Social Affairs erected tents for temporary housing; provided rice, barley, and other foodstuffs to some 6,561 people; and dispatched 223 doctors, 232 nurses, 215 medical aides, and 90 ambulances to provide free medical care for the victims.
- Iri school students were to be exempted from fees until February, 1978. The Ministry of Education allocated 48 million won (\$99,709) to replace school fee revenue and 300 million won (\$623,182) for reconstruction of facilities.
- The provincial government provided city-owned cemetery plots for free burial of all victims whose families so desired.

- The National Disaster Control Headquarters and the Korean National Railroad Agency decided to give bereaved families compensation in the amount of 3.5 million won (\$7,270) for each victim aged 10-60 and 2.46 million won (\$5,110) for those victims under 10 or 60 and over.
- Another rehabilitation measure was to give preferential loans and tax write-offs. Those whose homes were 50% or more destroyed were released from paying income tax.
- The Government decided to declare the devastated portion of Iri City a "redevelopment area" and to build a new railroad station plus 23 apartment buildings to house 50 families each. At least two members of each household in Iri were to be employed in these various activities. Materials, civil engineers, carpenters, and so on were brought from other parts of Korea on a priority basis to help relieve shortages. Total government allocations for relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction amounted to \$13 billion won (\$27 million).
- Officials of the Korea Explosives Company and the Korean National Railroad Agency were prosecuted in connection with the explosion.
- The Korean Red Cross distributed blankets, staffed three daycare centers, and prepared hot meals for some of the homeless.
- Four medical teams of the Korean Red Cross treated over 1,000 people.
- The Korea Newspapers Association decided to accept contributions for Iri victims from the general public through newspapers. At least 451,216,700 won (\$937,300) was donated by Korean businesses and the Korean public.
- Glorious International donated 100 pieces of clothing.

TOTAL-\$27,937,300

Assistance Provided by the United States Government (USG)

- On November 14, 1977, the U. S. Ambassador to Korea, Richard L. Sneider, determined that a disaster of such a magnitude as to warrant USG assistance had occurred in Korea.
- The Ambassador's discretionary authority of \$25,000 was donated to the Korean Red Cross for the purchase of blankets, clothing, and stoves for the homeless.
- Mattresses (200) from excess property were donated to the Korean Red Cross for a hospital facility. Estimated value: \$4,000.
- Housing Investment Guaranty loan funds were utilized to construct low-cost housing as part of the redevelopment area.

TOTAL-\$29,000

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Assistance Provided by U. S. Voluntary Agencies

-- The American National Red Cross transferred \$395 given by individuals to the Korean Red Cross.

TOTAL-\$395

Assistance Provided by the International Community

Governments

-- Australia -- \$2,000 to the Red Cross

-- Canada -- \$9,346 to the Red Cross

-- Federal Republic of Germany -- \$20,000 to the Red Cross

-- Japan -- \$30,000 to the Red Cross

Voluntary Agencies

-- Anglicans -- \$208

-- Federal Republic of Germany Red Cross -- \$303,251 in kind

-- Japanese Red Cross -- \$2,316 in kind

Private

-- Seoul Foreign School students -- \$98 in cash

TOTAL-\$369,219

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